



Leaders Note

Acts 4:32- 5:16 Surprised by the Wrath of God

Thought

“We wither beneath your anger; we are overwhelmed by your fury. You spread out our sins before you— our secret sins—and you see them all. We live our lives beneath your wrath, ending our years with a groan...” (Psalm 90:7-9) Moses’ words tend to go over like a lead balloon. They probably won’t be found on many devotional calendars, nor are they likely to be inscribed as a catchy saying on giveaway pens. “The tale that was told” in Moses’ generation was a tale involving a trail through the desert of over 600,000 graves. That’s about the same number as died in the American Civil War. An entire sinful generation struck down in 40 years of wandering. Would God really do that? Surely that was just some Old Testament divine indigestion that has cleared up now, right? God is love, after all — right? The (literal) fall of Ananias and Sapphira sends us a clear signal that we haven’t somehow switched Gods between the covers of the Testaments (which may send chills down our spines — not necessarily a bad thing). “Behold, the kindness and the severity of God,” Paul says. The God who is love is also a consuming fire, which means ultimately that we don’t have the luxury of tailoring God to suit our tastes and expectations. It also means that the reformation of this world is carried forward by those who don’t presume to mess with God or play fast and loose with sin and breaches of integrity. Reformers are always being reformed through the ongoing personal touch of God’s holiness.

Context

Satan’s role and our responsibility: “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” Whether by the look on their faces or by divine revelation and insight, Peter sees the guilt of Ananias and Sapphira, as well as the direct involvement of Satan in the entire affair. Ajith Fernando in the NIV Application Commentary on Acts suggests five important truths from Peter’s comments to the doomed couple:

1. Satan had so filled and controlled Ananias’ heart that he was carried away in his actions.
2. Satan’s activity does not remove responsibility from Ananias. Verse 3 attributes the act to Satan’s influence, but verse 4 places responsibility for his action squarely on Ananias.
3. The most serious thing Ananias did was to lie to the Holy Spirit, not keep back part of the money. Later Peter said that he could have done anything he wanted with his money.
4. When we lie to each other, we’re ultimately lying to God. God takes our actions towards one another very personally. When Saul persecutes the church, Jesus asks ‘Why are you persecuting Me?’
5. Since giving was not mandatory, the desire Satan had put within this couple was probably for recognition and esteem.

A Levite: Levites normally didn't own land in Israel; it's possible that there were exceptions made for those living outside of Israel, or that this was property owned in Cyprus by Barnabas and then sold with the proceeds subsequently brought to the apostles in Jerusalem.

Kept back part of the price: The Greek word means literally to pilfer or embezzle — in this case they embezzle their own funds! It's a word actually used only a few times in the biblical record, but significantly it is used also in the Greek Old Testament account of Achan (Joshua 7). Achan (his name means "trouble") had taken gold and some other precious items from the fallen city of Jericho, and he hid them under his tent — all against a direct divine prohibition to do so. His action became a roadblock for the people of Israel in moving forward, and his identity and crime eventually were exposed through a combination of lots and confession. Achan was stoned to death, along with his family. Using the same somewhat rare word to the action of Achan and Ananias forms an interesting link between the two stories.

Great fear seized the whole church: The first use of the word "church" (Greek ekklesia) in the book of Acts (it occurs 23 times in Acts). An interesting context in which to make its debut!

More men and women believed: The first specific mention of women believing in the book of Acts (outside of the presence of women in the upper room). This will become a significant theme as we continue moving through the story of Acts.



Learning Session

Introduce today's passage by filling your folk in on some of the contextual information above. Get someone to read the above passage and follow it by asking the group this question "As a child, how would your parents punish you when you were caught in a lie?" After this split up into smaller groups to discuss the following questions:

1. What did Ananias and Sapphira have to gain by lying about how much they gave?
2. Why link does the miracles story in vv 12-16 have with the Ananias and Sapphira incident?
3. Why do you think God's judgment was so severe? How does this judgment impact you and your view of God?

Gather together for a time of feedback. People will probably have a variety of answers, especially to no.3. You can help shed light on this incident by pointing out that the church was in its early days. In addition the community in Jerusalem was tight and everyone knew everyone else's business. It is more than likely that Ananias and Sapphira would be found out sooner rather than later as to the price they actually paid for the land. So the question is this, if you were in God's shoes, and you knew that the Church was still fragile, could you let Ananias and Sapphira set a precedent of doing things to please man, or would you nip this in the bud considering that your church is about to come under persecution in the not too distant future? Ultimately the story teaches us this; God is passionate about our purity and integrity.

As you move into a time of ministry, allow a time of confession. Ask (rhetorical, of course) the group if they are living any lies to impress people rather than being honest before God. Have a time of silence and allow folk to repent of these things.

Discussion Questions

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